

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: Monica Billen

Department: Literacy, Early, Bilingual, & Special Education

College: Kremen School of Education & Human Development

Leave taken: ☒ Sabbatical      ☐ Difference in Pay      ☐ Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period: ☒ Fall 2023

☐ Spring

☐ Academic Year

☐ Other

Your report will be sent to your Dean for your PAF and to the Library Archives.

Sabbatical Report - Fall 2023

Monica T. Billen, Ph.D  
Associate Professor  
Literacy, Early, Bilingual, Special Education  
Kremen School of Education  
California State University, Fresno

## Introduction

As an associate professor of literacy education, I'm passionate about children learning to read and write. While literacy instruction has always been important, the effect of the global pandemic on children's literacy (EdSource, 2022) and the recent heavy push for *science of reading* (EdWeek, 2022) has forced educators into a crisis. This crisis highlighted the urgent need to quickly share professional knowledge with educators, prompting me to explore how literacy research and practice could be more swiftly delivered.

Teachers face mounting pressure to address learning loss but often lack the support and time to engage with current research and evidence-based strategies. Accessible, practical literacy research at their fingertips is essential. While writing a practitioner-friendly book was an option, the process is slow, the content becomes outdated, and there's no guarantee teachers would access it. Instead, technology offers a dynamic way to share relevant research and enhance classroom practice. My sabbatical aimed to leverage technology to make a meaningful impact in the field of education.

During my sabbatical, I embarked on a project to leverage social media as a platform for disseminating culturally sustaining literacy research and practices. The primary objective was to create a professional Instagram account, @drbillen\_thereadingprofessor, aimed at sharing philosophical views on literacy, simplifying current literacy research for a broader audience, and providing practical applications for educators and parents. Though the account was initially created to help parents, I soon found that it mostly helped parents.

## Account Development and Content Creation

The Instagram account was established in September 2023. Dr. Billen, *The Reading Professor*, is an Instagram page dedicated to helping parents and educators foster a love of reading in children. Through engaging reels, book recommendations, and practical literacy tips, the page makes research-based reading strategies accessible and easy to implement.

Over the course of the sabbatical, I dedicated approximately 40 hours per week to researching, creating, and posting content. The content strategy included daily posts featuring multimodal elements such as images, videos, and infographics to cater to diverse learning preferences. Topics covered ranged from summaries of recent literacy studies to practical classroom strategies and book recommendations that reflect cultural diversity.

I spent a significant amount of time creating free resources for parents and teachers. Though I began the account to help teachers, I soon found that most of my followers were parents who wanted to help their children. I created two main resources for parents: 1. Guides to help parents *teach* their child *how* to read, and 2. Guides to help parents read specific books to their children. Parents became fond of the free reading guides that were sent to their Instagram account via direct message.

The following content was created for Instagram:

Instagram Posts created	Instagram Captions created	Free Reading Guides Created	Free Book Guides Created
255	255	25	70

Click [HERE](#) to see an example of a book guide.

Click [HERE](#) or [HERE](#) to see an example of a reading guide.

### Audience Engagement and Growth

The account experienced significant growth, attracting a diverse audience of educators, literacy advocates, and parents. Several reels garnered high view counts, indicating a strong interest in the content provided. Engagement metrics, including likes, comments, and shares, demonstrated active participation from the audience, suggesting that the content resonated with and met the needs of the community.

### Audience Growth

Followers	Posts created	Highest Reel Views	2nd Highest Views
135,000	250	6 million	3.4 million



**Top Location of Followers**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Percentage of followers</b>	<b>Cities</b>	<b>Percentage of Followers</b>
United States	57.1%	New York	1.4%
United Kingdom	7.9%	London	1.3%
Canada	6.8%	Sydney	1.3%
Australia	5.4%	Melbourne	1.2%
India	4.1%	Singapore	1.1%

**Follower Demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Women	93.7%
Men	6.2%

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
13-17	.1%
18-24	1.5%
25-34	28.7%
35-44	54.8%
45-54	8.9%
55-64	2.6%
65+	3.1%

## **Impact and Reflections**

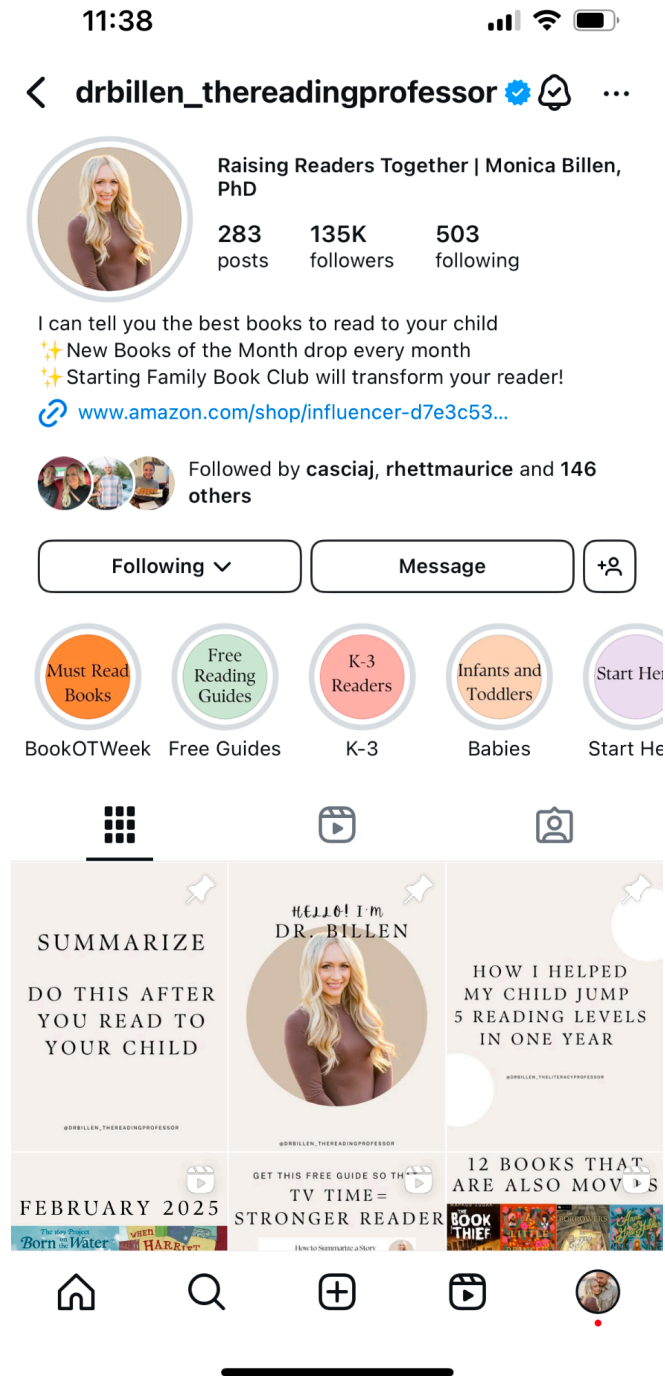
The initiative successfully utilized Instagram as a dynamic platform to disseminate literacy research and practices swiftly and effectively. The positive reception and active engagement from the audience highlight the potential of social media in bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in education. This experience underscores the importance of adapting dissemination methods to contemporary channels to reach and impact a broader audience.

## **Conclusion**

The sabbatical project achieved its objectives of creating a professional Instagram presence to share culturally sustaining literacy content. The growth and engagement metrics indicate a successful outreach to educators and other stakeholders. Moving forward, I plan to continue developing content for the account and exploring additional ways to integrate social media into educational practice and research dissemination.


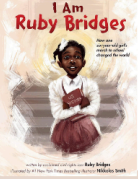
## Appendix A

### Instagram Page



## Appendix B

### Sample Book Guide

<p>Follow the Prepare, Interact, Summarize model Look below for examples of what to say!</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Raising Readers Together : February Books</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Click HERE for the Read Aloud on YouTube</a></u></p>
<p><b>CHAPTER BOOK OF THE MONTH</b></p>  <p>This is a historical fiction novel set during WWII. It follows the story of Ada, a young girl with a clubfoot, and her brother Jamie, as they are evacuated from London to the countryside. Through their experiences with their guardian Susan Smith, Ada learns about love, resilience, and the power of self-discovery</p> <p><b>Vocabulary to Cover Before Reading</b></p> <p><b>Brown V. Board:</b> A landmark court case in 1954- Supreme Court ruled that public schools should not be segregated</p> <p><b>ancient:</b> very old</p> <p><b>escort:</b> someone who walks with someone to make sure they are safe</p> <p><b>opportunity:</b> a chance to do something</p> <p><b>Supreme Court:</b> the highest court in the US- a group of judges who decide if something is fair or unfair</p> <p><b>Ruby Bridges Information</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. She became a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement at the age of six when she integrated William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1960.</li> <li>2. Ruby was the first Black child to attend the all-white elementary school, which was previously segregated.</li> <li>3. Due to her integration of the school, Ruby faced immense hostility and discrimination from white parents and community members.</li> <li>4. The school's white teachers refused to teach Ruby, so for her first year, she was taught by a single teacher, Barbara Henry.</li> <li>5. Ruby's actions paved the way for the desegregation of schools in the US.</li> <li>6. In 1999, Ruby Bridges established the Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote tolerance, respect, and appreciation of diversity through education.</li> </ol>	<p><b>PICTURE BOOK OF THE WEEK</b></p>  <p>This book tells the true story of Ruby Bridges' experience as the first Black child to integrate an all-white school in New Orleans in 1960-- from her 6-year-old perspective-- Ruby Bridges is the author!!</p> <p><b>PREPARE</b> children for the book <u>before</u> reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your name is _____. Do you know why you were named that? Do you like your name?</li> <li>• This is a story of a really important girl from history named Ruby but she didn't like her name very much       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ But it turns out her name is very important to her story- especially BRIDGES</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have you heard of Ruby Bridges? What do you know about her?       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ She was the first black child to attend an all-white school (show photos on the next pages)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• This is a book written by Ruby Bridges and it talks about being the first black child in a white school</li> <li>• Have you ever stood for something that you felt was right even when others around you disagreed?</li> <li>• Tell your child the vocab words they don't know (check the glossary in the back of the book)</li> </ul> <p><b>INTERACT</b> with children <u>during</u> reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice on the bridge at the beginning of the book that black and white are separate</li> <li>• How is Ruby like a Bridge?</li> <li>• Why didn't Ruby like her name?</li> <li>• What would you think if you went to school and no one was there?</li> <li>• There were a lot of people who didn't think what Ruby was doing was right but she stayed strong</li> </ul> <p><b>SUMMARIZE</b> the book <u>after</u> reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare the bridges at the beginning of the book to the end of the book.</li> <li>• The story began by mentioning that Ruby did not like her name but by the end, she found power in her name. She is an important symbol of BRIDGING people together.</li> <li>• What things can we do to be like Ruby and bridge people together?</li> </ul>
	<p>@DrBillen_TheReadingProfessor</p>

[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE BOOKS!](#)

Reading to your child is the most impactful thing you can do.

[Raising Readers Together : January Books](#)

If your little one struggles to sit still while being read to, print this page and have them color while you read to them.



@DrBillen\_TheReadingProfessor

[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE BOOKS!](#)

Reading to your child is the most impactful thing you can do.

[Raising Readers Together : January Books](#)

Bridges bring two sides together that are usually separate.

Ruby was like a bridge by bringing black and white people together.

She was brave and continued to go to school even though many people did not want her there.

Write on the bridge things YOU can do to bring different people together.



[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE BOOKS!](#)

Reading to your child is the most impactful thing you can do.

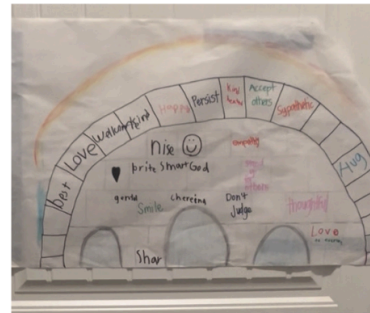
[Raising Readers Together : January Books](#)

### Building Bridges of Understanding and Kindness

#### Materials Needed:

Construction paper or poster board  
Markers, crayons, or colored pencils  
Scissors  
Glue or tape  
Assorted craft materials (optional)

#### Instructions:



**We watched THIS clip to help us with the drawing.** (turn the volume off when watching with children)

Begin by discussing with the children the concept of kindness and its importance in building connections with others. Explain that WE can serve as bridges that bring people together and create a more caring and inclusive community.

Provide each child with a piece of construction paper or poster board and ask them to create their own "Bridge of Kindness." They can design and decorate their bridges using markers, crayons, colored pencils, and any other craft materials they have available.

Encourage the children to think about different ways they can show kindness to others, both big and small. They can write or draw examples of acts of kindness on their bridges, such as sharing toys, helping a friend, saying kind words, or being inclusive, welcoming and standing up for others.

Once the bridges are decorated and filled with acts of kindness, help the children cut out their bridges using scissors.

Create a large display area where the children can assemble their bridges together to form a "Bridge of Kindness" mural. Arrange the bridges side by side, overlapping them slightly to create the illusion of a continuous bridge.

Display the "Bridge of Kindness" mural in a prominent place where the children can see it as a daily reminder of the importance of kindness in creating a more compassionate and supportive community.

Remind the children how Ruby was like a BRIDGE and we can be, too.

@DrBillen\_TheReadingProfessor



[CLICK HERE FOR A LINK TO THE BOOKS!](#)

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@DrBillen\_TheReadingProfessor

## Appendix C

### Sample Reading Guide

# Coaching Children

## THROUGH THE DECODING PROCESS

When children come across words that they don't know, our goal is to help build strategies to use when they encounter new words in the future.

We can do this by:


- showing them what we do in our own head and
- coaching them through their own thinking

**Decoding:**  
The process of translating written code (letters) into speech.

**Phoneme Isolation:**  
Parsing out one specific sound from a word

**Blending:**  
The process of joining speech sounds to make a word.

**Chunking:**  
Breaking down words into smaller, more manageable parts or "chunks"



### Validate

Children need a reminder that the process of decoding is **EXTREMELY** difficult.

Wow. Reading is probably one of the trickiest things your brain has to do.


Whoa. That is a super tricky word!


### Puzzle

Children need to be told explicitly what they're trying to do.

Letters give us clues and we have to figure out the puzzle.

When we see words we don't know, we have to try to figure out the puzzle by using what we know about sounds and letters.





### Model

Say what you do in your head if you were trying to decode that word.

I see two words within that word.. I'm going to try to figure out the first word, then add in the second word.

I see the letter B so I say /b/ then I see A. I'm going to blend that with /b/ BA..then the last letter I see is T, when I add it in I get BAT

@DrBillen\_ TheLiteracyProfessor

# Pull it Together

## The first time

Wow. That is a super tricky word. Reading is one of the hardest things for our brains to do! Reading is actually kind of like a puzzle. The paper has letters on it. And we have to figure out what the letters are and connect them with their sounds. It's really tricky because when different letters get together they can make different sounds.

When I look at this word, the first thing I look at is the first letter. I see that the first letter is s but then the next letter is -h. I know that SH say shhh when they get together. Then I saw the l which says /i/...SHI...then I saw the last letter is P!

## After some time..

Wow, tricky word. Let's figure out the puzzle.

The first letter I see is B, so I said /b/,  
then what do you see?

## After more time..

Wow, tricky word.  
Let's figure out the puzzle.  
What do you notice?

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# Model Chunking

## Phonetic Chunking:

Breaking a word into smaller phonetic elements, such as individual consonant or vowel sounds.

### Common Sound/Letter Correspondences

#### Short Vowel Sounds:

- "A" /æ/ as in "cat"
- "E" /ɛ/ as in "egg"
- "I" /ɪ/ as in "pig"
- "O" /ɑ/ as in "dog"
- "U" /ʌ/ as in "duck"

#### Consonant Sounds:

- "B" /b/ as in "bat"
- "D" /d/ as in "dog"
- "F" /f/ as in "fish"
- "M" /m/ as in "mouse"
- "N" /n/ as in "note"
- "P" /p/ as in "pen"
- "T" /t/ as in "tree"
- "S" /s/ as in "snake"
- "K" /k/ as in "kite"
- "G" /g/ as in "goat"
- "L" /l/ as in "lion"

#### Digraphs:

- "TH" /θ/ as in "think" or /ð/ as in "this"
- "SH" /ʃ/ as in "shoe"
- "CH" /tʃ/ as in "chair"
- "WH" /w/ as in "whale"
- "CK" /k/ as in "duck"

## Syllable Chunking

Dividing a word into its syllables can make it easier to decode.

Show the child how many syllables are in the word by putting your hand under your chin and counting how many times your chin hits your hand. Show them the syllables in the word.

## Prefix and Suffix Chunking

Separating prefixes and suffixes from the base word can be helpful.

For example, in the word "unhappiness," you can first identify "un-" as the prefix and "-ness" as the suffix.

## Other Common Sound/Letter Correspondences to Model

ai like in raid

air in chair

ar in barn

au in cause

aw in claw

ay in day

ea in team

ear in dear

ee in see

er in her

ew in blew

ey in key

igh in fight

ir in dirt

oa in float

oi in join

oo in food

oor in door

## Billen Sabbatical Application

### Basic Application Information

Monica T. Billen, Ph.D  
Associate Professor  
Literacy, Early, Bilingual, Special Education  
Kremen School of Education  
California State University, Fresno

## Billen Sabbatical Application

### Purpose of Leave

As an associate professor of literacy education, I'm passionate about children learning to read and write. While literacy has always been important, the effect of the global pandemic on children's literacy (EdSource, 2022) and the recent heavy push for *science of reading* (EdWeek, 2022) has forced educators into a crisis. This crisis has made me realize there is a critical need for disseminating professional information immediately and led me to wonder how literacy research and practice can swiftly be presented to educators. Teachers are under increased pressure to ameliorate the learning loss but are not given the scaffolding, or time to absorb current research and research-based teaching practices. Easily accessible literacy research and practice that is at teachers' fingertips is critical. While I could compile research and write a practitioner-friendly book, the process is slow, the content is stagnant, and teachers may or may not purchase the book. Technology can be used to provide exposure to applicable research that can expand educators' classroom practice. The purpose of my leave is to use technology to influence the field of education.

The purpose of this sabbatical application is to request sufficient time for the creation of a professional Instagram account focused on culturally sustaining literacy research and practice. The purpose of this Instagram account is threefold, (a) to share philosophical views of literacy, (b) to disseminate current literacy research in layman's terms, and (c) to provide practical implications of literacy research. Though the impetus for the account is educator focused, the creation of this account could have broad implications for children, parents, policymakers and students interested in Fresno State education programs.

### Brief Description

Instagram is a widely used social media platform with over 1.4 billion worldwide users. Though the mobile based application began as a way for individuals to share photos with friends, it has quickly become a mecca for learning new information. Whether you're interested in learning about current events, parenting tips, health and fitness, or American politics, Instagram has it readily available. One can learn this information by following accounts, reading the explore page, following hashtags, or seeing what information their friends are sharing. I aim to add culturally sustaining literacy research and practices to the vast information that is available on Instagram with the goal of educating thousands.

This proposed creative activity is similar to the creation of a book in many ways. The process of writing a book includes researching, brainstorming, planning, drafting, writing, revising, editing and publishing. Similarly, the goal of writing a book is to share information and to encourage greater depth and insight. In that same way, my professional Instagram account would go through similar steps of writing with the same goal of influencing others' knowledge. There are also several differences between writing a book and creating an Instagram account. Unlike writing a book where you publish it once, I will be publishing content almost every day, indefinitely. This allows the content to be dynamic and ever changing. Additionally, rather than writing chapters in a book with only alphabetic text, I will be writing brief posts that are multimodal in nature (e.g., visual, aural, gestural). This multimodal nature allows me

## Billen Sabbatical Application

to model literacy strategies more readily. In order to create literacy content with the goal of educating thousands about current research and practice, I need a significant amount of time to work on this creative endeavor.

### **Resources**

The resource needed for the completion of this project is time. No other resources are needed.

### **Time**

This application focuses on the creation of a professional Instagram page. I am requesting one semester to get the account up and running and aim to continue posting to the account for the foreseeable future. In order to set up a professional page that seeks to communicate knowledge to a wide audience, approximately 40 hours per week during one semester is needed to research and create content.



**Leave Proposal**

Monica T. Billen, Ph.D  
Associate Professor  
Literacy, Early, Bilingual, Special Education  
Kremen School of Education  
California State University, Fresno

# Billen Sabbatical Application

## Leave Proposal

### Purpose

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### Benefit to the University

Many colleges, departments, and programs across Fresno State campus have hired individuals to create and maintain social media accounts. This is because we know that our current students, previous students, future students, local community members, and donors all have and use social media readily. We know that our university must have a presence online to stay current and remain recognized locally and nationally. The proposed project has many benefits for the Literacy, Early, Bilingual, Special Education department, the Kremen School of Education, and Fresno State.

While the main benefit to the university is visibility of expertise, knowledge, and research, other benefits include but are not limited to:

- Program recruitment for credential program
- Local interest in literacy master's program
- Teacher and district awareness of Fresno State
- University rapport with community members

The University can benefit from the visibility of university professors engaging with community members, teachers, and school districts. A sabbatical would allow me to engage with community partners in the creation of digital content and in the sharing of such digital content.

### Program of Activities

## Billen Sabbatical Application

This sabbatical project which seeks sufficient time for the creation of a professional Instagram account focused on culturally sustaining literacy research and practice, will follow a three step process. These three major steps include, instagram account research, account creation, and account outreach.

### Account Research

Before creating my own professional account, I will search and locate ten model Instagram accounts that have similar goals. After identifying model accounts, I will assess what aspects of the account seem to work well and brainstorm how those aspects can be used for my own account.

### Account Creation

After better understanding Instagram accounts that aim to educate, I will create my own account. First, I will create and name the account. From there I will create a series of editable graphics that can be used repeatedly. Lastly, I will begin to create content. This process will include three major types of content including, (a) philosophical views of literacy, (b) current literacy research, and (c) practical implications of literacy research. Each post in each of these three areas will follow the basic steps of research, brainstorm, create, revise, edit and publish. For example, to share current literacy research I will find a salient article, read the research, brainstorm how to summarize the article, and create an Instagram post about the research article findings. Likewise, when I create a post about practical implications, I will research the strategy, brainstorm how to explain that strategy, and publish that strategy. This might include a video of me engaging in that specific strategy. Content creation will continue throughout the entire leave.

### Account Outreach

When a significant amount of content has been created, I will focus on how this professional account can gain visibility. This can be accomplished by engaging with others on Instagram, asking others to follow my account, and creating striking content that others will be prompted to share on their own accounts. The purpose of this phase of the project is to share literacy knowledge with more people.

### Timeline

Month	Activities
August	Instagram Research  Week 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify model accounts<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Study account organization</li><li>Study display of research (e.g., audio, visual)</li></ul></li></ul>

## Billen Sabbatical Application

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Analyze number of posts vs stories</li> <li>○ Analyze reels feature</li> <li>○ Identify account design</li> </ul> <p>Week 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brainstorm my own account based off of model accounts</li> <li>● Create plan for my own professional account</li> </ul>
<b>September</b>	<p>Week 1</p> <p>Instagram Account Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brainstorm instagram handles</li> <li>● Identify account name</li> </ul> <p>Week 2 &amp; 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create graphics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Account name graphic</li> <li>○ 10-15 slide graphics</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create bio and “about” Instagram story</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<p>Week 1-4</p> <p>Instagram Post Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3-5 posts per week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Philosophy</li> <li>○ Research</li> <li>○ Practice</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 12 articles summarized</li> <li>● 12 practical strategies shared</li> <li>● 12 philosophical statements shared</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<p>Instagram Post Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3-5 posts per week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Philosophy</li> <li>○ Research</li> <li>○ Practice</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 12 articles summarized</li> <li>● 12 practical strategies shared</li> <li>● 12 philosophical statements shared</li> </ul> <p>Instagram Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tag other Instagram Accounts</li> <li>● Ask accounts to share my account</li> <li>● Giveaways</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<p>Instagram Post Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3-5 posts per week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Philosophy</li> <li>○ Research</li> <li>○ Practice</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Billen Sabbatical Application

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 12 articles summarized</li><li>• 12 practical strategies shared</li><li>• 12 philosophical statements shared</li></ul> <p>Instagram Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tag other Instagram Accounts</li><li>• Ask accounts to share my account</li><li>• Giveaways</li></ul>
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### Conclusion

The purpose of university sabbatical is to allow faculty to engage in a project that strengthens the faculty member and benefits the university. In my current position as an associate professor, I carry a heavy teaching load and coordinate a master's program. The responsibilities that I currently carry do not allow me to engage in extra creative work. The amount of time needed to read research, summarize research, create visually appealing posts, and engage in outreach is absolutely impossible to add on to my full time job. The work that I have proposed above will take approximately forty hours per week for the entire semester.

The proposed project has the potential to benefit the university through visibility and publicity while also helping educators.